

Message Text

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ACTION OPR-02

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3962

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRUSSELS 04544

PASS THE WHITE HOUSE FOR CAVANEY/WEIDENFELD

E.O. 11652: ADS-DECLAS 7/1/75

TAGS: OVIP (FORD, GERALD R.)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

THE FOLLOWING ARE BRIEF SKETCHES ON ITEMS IN BELGIUM WHICH
MAY BE OF INTEREST TO MRS. FORD:

1. QUEEN FABIOLA

FABIOLA, QUEEN OF THE BELGIANS, WAS BORN JUNE 11, 1928,
IN MADRID AND IS OF SPANISH ORIGIN. HAVING GROWN UP AT THE
TIME OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, THE QUEEN HAS A HORROR OF
VIOLENCE AND OF COMMUNISTS. SHE DISLIKES BULLFIGHTS AND
HUNTING AND IS EXTREMELY FOND OF NATURE AND ANIMALS. QUEEN
FABIOLA IS VERY ACTIVE IN PROMOTING AND PROTECTING THE ARTS.
SHE HERSELF HAS WRITTEN A BOOK OF CHILDREN'S STORIES; SHE
DRAWS, PAINTS, PLAYS THE GUITAR A LITTLE AND THE PIANO.
SHE READS A GOOD DEAL, CHIEFLY IN THE ARTS, LOVES MUSIC
AND COLLECTS RECORDS. (THE KING IS A NOTED COLLECTOR OF RE-
CORDINGS OF AFRICAN CHANTS.)

THE QUEEN'S SPORTS ARE TENNIS, SWIMMING AND BICYCLING.
(CYCLING IS AN IMPORTANT SPORT TO BELGIANS AND THEIR HERO
IS CYCLING CHAMPION EDDIE MERCKX.)

THE QUEEN IS SERIOUS, DEVOUT AND SHOWS HER CONCERN FOR THE
LESS FORTUNATE IN PRACTICAL WAYS. SHE SPEAKS A NUMBER OF LAN-
GUAGES WELL, INCLUDING EXCELLENT ENGLISH.

IN 1960. SHE MARRIED KING BAUDOUIN I (WHO HAD ACCEDED TO
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THE THRONE IN 1951 UPON THE SEMI-FORCED ABDICATION OF

BAUDOUIN'S FATHER, LEOPOLD III, DUE TO PUBLIC FEELING ABOUT LEOPOLD'S BEHAVIOUR DURING WORLD WAR II. THE ROYAL COUPLE FEEL THAT LEOPOLD III WAS NOT FAIRLY TREATED BY THE BELGIAN PUBLIC IN THIS RESPECT.).

THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING AND QUEEN IS REPUTED TO BE VERY HAPPY ALTHOUGH CHILDLESS. THE QUEEN HAS HAD SEVERAL MIS-CARRIAGES AND FEELS HER CHILDLESSNESS DEEPLY.

IN DIRECT ADDRESS, THE QUEEN IS CALLED MADAME AND IS REFERRED TO AS HER MAJESTY, OR HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN OF THE BELGIANS.

2. MRS. LEONARD FIRESTONE

BARBARA KINCKERBOCKER (NICKY) FIRESTONE, WIFE OF U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BELGIUM LEONARD K. FIRESTONE, WAS BORN AND GREW UP IN SAN FRANCISCO WHERE SHE ATTENDED SARAH DIX HAMLIN SCHOOL. MARRIED SAN FRANCISCO BANKER STUART HEATLEY BY WHOM SHE HAD FOUR DAUGHTERS, AGED 35 TO 25, THREE OF THEM MARRIED, GIVING HER THREE GRANDSONS AND TWO GRANDDAUGHTERS. MR. HEATLEY DIED IN 1964.

IN 1966 SHE MARRIED AMBASSADOR FIRESTONE WHO HAD RECENTLY LOST HIS FIRST WIFE, POLLY.

MRS. FIRESTONE'S CHIEF PROJECT BEFORE HER MARRIAGE TO AMBASSADOR FIRESTONE WAS HER WORK ON THE BOARD OF THE VISITING NURSE ASSOC. OF SAN FRANCISCO. SHE HAS ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN THE BOY AND GIRL SCOUTS ALSO.

INTERESTED AND EXTREMELY KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT ANTIQUE FURNITURE AND FURNISHINGS, OLD PRINTS, NEEDLEWORK AND FLOWERS. A DEVOUTED BARGAINHUNTER AND HOSTESS.

3. GRAND' PLACE OF BRUSSELS

THE MARKET SQUARE IN THE CENTER OF BRUSSELS, (BELGIUM'S CAPITAL AND SEAT OF THE COMMON MARKET). THE GRAND' PLACE DATES BACK TO THE TWELFTH CENTURY ITS OLDEST BUILDING, THE TOWN HALL (WHICH STILL CONTAINS THE MAYOR'S OFFICE) IS OF FLAMBOYANT GOTHIC STYLE WITH A LACY SPIRE THAT TOWERS OVER THE DOWNTOWN AREA.

THE BEAUTY OF THE SQUARE, HOWEVER, IS THE INDIRECT RESULT OF A THREE-DAY BOMBARDMENT BY THE FRENCH ARMY IN 1695 WHICH LEVELED ALL THE OTHER BUILDINGS. THESE WERE THEN REBUILT IN THE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY AND THEIR

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ELEGANT GUILDED BAROQUE FACADES GIVE THE SQUARE A HARMONIOUS UNITY THAT WOULD PROBABLY NEVER HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED IF THE BUILDINGS HAD NOT ALL GONE UP MORE OR LESS SIMULTANEOUSLY. THE BUILDINGS WERE FOR THE MOST PART THE HEAD-QUARTERS OF GILDS OR CORPORATIONS. LA COURONNE, (THE CROWN) BUILT IN 1709 AND LE CYGNE (THE SWAN) BUILT IN 1698 NOW HOUSE WELL-KNOWN RESTAURANTS. IN GOOD WEATHER TABLES AND CHAIRS LINE THE SIDES OF THE SQUARE AND FLOWER SELLERS OCCUPY THE

CENTER. IT IS WELL ILLUMINATED AT NIGHT.

4. THE QUEEN ELISABETH INTERNATIONAL MUSIC CONTEST
ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS MUSICAL COM-
PETITIONS, IT IS NAME FOR ITS FOUNDER, WIFE OF THE
LATE KING ALBERT AND GRANDMOTHER OF KING BAUDOUIN.
THIS YEAR'S PEANO COMPETITION WILL BE HELD MAY 26-31
AT THE PALAIS DES BEAUX ARTS. NEXT YEAR'S VIOLIN
COMPETITION WILL BE DEDICATED TO THE 100 BIRTH
ANNIVERSARY OF QUEEN ELISABETH, WHO DIED IN 1965.

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O 221147Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3963

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BRUSSELS 04544

DEPT. FOR A/O

PASS THE WHITE HOUSE FOR CAVANEY/WEIDENFELD

5. PALAIS DES BEAUX ARTS

SITE OF THE QUEEN ELISABETH INTERNATIONAL MUSIC
CONTEST, WAS BUILT IN 1928 BY THE FAMOUS BELGIAN
"ART NOUVEAU" ARCHITECT BARON HORTA. IT IS THE FORUM
FOR MANY OF BRUSSELS' ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES AND PROBABLY
IS THE OLDEST CULTURAL CENTER, IN THE MODERN SENSE,
ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.

6. GHENT (SPELLED GENT IN DUTCH AND GAND IN FRENCH)

CAPITAL OF THE BELGIAN PROVINCE OF EAST FLANDERS,
THE COUNTRY'S SECOND LARGEST PORT (AFTER ANTWERP),
IT HAS 225,000 INHABITANTS. THE PEOPLE ARE CALLED
FLEMINGS AND THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF GHENT IS DUTCH,
OFTEN CALLED FLEMISH. AN IMPORTANT TEXTILE

INDUSTRY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF GHENT ARE LOCATED THERE.

ROOTS OF THE TOWN GO BACK 1200 YEARS AND THIS SUMMER IT IS CELEBRATING THE LAST THOUSAND YEARS OF ITS HISTORY AND ART WITH SPECIAL EXHIBITS IN ITS MUSEUMS. A STROLL DOWN THE STREETS OF THE OLD QUARTER, HOWEVER, DISCLOSES MUCH OF ITS HISTORY: THE CRENELLATED TOWERS OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY CASTLE OF THE COUNTS OF FLANDERS--SEAT OF GHENT'S ARISTOCRATIC OVERLORDS--AND THE MAGNIFICENT HOUSES OF ITS "THIRTY-NINE FAMILIES", THE WEALTHY
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MERCHANTS WHO BARGAINED AND FOUGHT FOR AUTONOMY FROM THE FLEMISH COUNTS, THE BURGUNDIAN DUKES, THE FRENCH KINGS AND THE SPANISH EMPERORS WHO TRIED SUCCESSIVELY TO RULE THEM.

THE WEALTH OF GHENT--AT ITS PEAK IN THE EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURY WHEN THE TOWN WAS, AFTER PARIS, THE LARGEST CITY NORTH OF THE ALPS--WAS BUILT CHIEFLY ON THE CLOTH TRADE, INVOLVING RAW WOOL IMPORTED FROM ENGLAND AND ELSEWHERE AND WOVEN BY MASTER FLEMISH ARTISANS FOR EXPORT THROUGHOUT EUROPE. OTHER TRADES AND CRAFTS FLOURISHED AND THE GAUDY FACADES OF THE GILD HALLS FRONT THE CANALS OF GHENT'S OLD QUARTER.

SITE IN 1814 OF THE TREATY OF GHENT, WHICH WAS FROM THE AMERICAN POINT OF VIEW A DIPLOMATIC VICTORY, BRINGING TO AN END THE WAR OF 1812.

7. THE GHENT ALTARPIECE

LOCATED IN A SIDE CHAPEL OF THE THOUSAND YEAR OLD CATHEDRAL OF ST. BAVO IS THE WORLD FAMOUS "ADORATION OF THE MYSTIC LAMB" BY THE FLEMISH PAINTERS HUBERT AND JAN VAN EYCK. AN ENORMOUS OIL PAINTING COVERING BOTH SIDES OF A HINGED ALTARPIECE, IT WAS PAINTED IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY AT THE BEQUEST OF ONE OF GHENT'S MERCHANT PRINCES. THE JEWEL-LIKE COLORS GLOW AS IF THE PAINTING WERE STILL FRESH. TECHNICALLY, IT IS THE FINEST OIL PAINTING OF THE AGE AND, MANY BELIEVE, OF ALL TIME.

8. MUDRA

MUDRA, WHICH CALLS ITSELF THE CENTER FOR PERFECTION AND RESEARCH FOR PERFORMING ARTISTS, IS UNDER THE ARTISTIC DIRECTION OF MAURICE BEJART, WHO IS ALSO DIRECTOR OF BELGIUM'S FAMOUS BALLET OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. MUDRA (NAME COMES FROM SANSKRIT WORD FOR GESTURE) IS CONCERNED WITH EXPANDING THE EXPRESSIVE VOCABULARY--IN SONG, DANCE, ACTING, MIME, RHYTHM--BY DRAWING ON TRADITIONS OF ALL CULTURES AND THE

EXPRESSION OF INNER FEELINGS OF THE INDIVIDUAL
PERFORMER. STUDENTS AT THE SCHOOL, SUBSIDIZED BY
THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AND UNESCO, ATTEND A THREE-YEAR
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PROGRAM TUITION FREE. STUDENTS ARE DRAWN FROM ALL
PARTS OF THE GLOBE, BOYS AND GIRLS FIFTEEN TO 21,
PREFERABLY WITH A CLASSICAL OR MODERN DANCE BACKGROUND.

PRESENTLY, GROUP IS REHEARSING A PERFORMANCE OF
MUSIC, DANCE AND ACTING CALLED AQUA ALTA (HIGH WATER)
TO BE PERFORMED TO BAROQUE MUSIC IN THE OPEN AIR AT
SAINT MARK'S SQUARE IN VENICE. PERFORMANCE WILL BE
IN AID OF THE EFFORT TO RESCUE THE ARCHITECTURAL
TREASURES OF VENICE FROM THE RISING WATER LEVEL OF
THE ADRIATIC SEA. MUDRA HAS A NUMBER OF AMERICAN
STUDENTS AND FACULTY.

MAURICE BEJART, CREATOR AND DIRECTOR OF MUDRA, IS
FRENCH BUT HAS MADE HIS REPUTATION IN BELGIUM WITH
HIS FAMOUS BALLET OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. AN
INNOVATOR IN ALL FIELDS OF THE PERFORMING ARTS, HE
DOES NOT NEGLECT THE CLASSICAL BALLET TRADITION BUT

IS BEST KNOWN FOR CHOREOGRAPHY IN WHICH MODERN
DANCE AND ORIENTAL DANCE ELEMENTS ARE ALSO INCLUDED.

THE SCHOOL'S MANAGER, MRS. MONETTE VERMAULEN, SPEAKS
ENGLISH. THE PRESIDENT OF THE SCHOOL IS FOREIGN
MINISTER RENAAT VAN ELSLANDE.

9. GRAND SABLON

A TRIANGULAR "SQUARE" IN DOWNTOWN BRUSSELS. ALONG
THE TOP IS THE FLAMBOYANT GOTHIC CHURCH, OUR LADY OF
VICTORY, ONE OF THE LOVELIEST CHURCHES IN BELGIUM.

THE OTHER SIDES OF THE SQUARE ARE LINED WITH
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY HOUSES, MANY OF WHICH NOW HOUSE
ANTIQUE STORES OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY. CAFES, A
FABULOUS PASTRY SHOP, SOME FINE RESTAURANTS AND
THE POST OFFICE MUSEUM ARE ALSO LOCATED THERE.

10. PETIT SABLON

UP THE HILL FROM THE GRAND SABLON, THE PETIT
SABLON IS A SMALL ENCLOSED FORMAL GARDEN IN THE
FRENCH STYLE CONTAINING STATUES OF THE COUNTS OF
EGMONT AND HOORN, BELGIUM'S NATIONAL MARTYR HEROES
FROM THE TIME OF THE SPANISH RULE. THE ENCLOSING
WALL IS TOPPED BY CHARMING BRONZE STATUES REPRESENTING
EACH OF THE CRAFTS OF BRUSSELS. AT NIGHT THESE
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ARE ILLUMINATED.
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